

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 268 428

CG 018 987

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TITLE Fantasy and Reality in Mark Twain's Aggression.  
PUB DATE 25 Aug 85  
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (93rd, Los Angeles, CA, August 23-27, 1985).  
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS \*Aggression; Competition; \*Fantasy; \*Letters (Correspondence); \*Literature; \*Psychological Patterns  
IDENTIFIERS \*Biographical Analysis; \*Twain (Mark)

## ABSTRACT

Psychoanalysis, a favorite method for studying personality and motivation, cannot be used on the dead. Instead, biographical analysis must be employed. This study examines Mark Twain's aggression by analyzing his writings, social behavior, and environmental aspects of his life. In viewing Mark Twain's novels as representing fantasy, 17 categories of aggression are discernible. Mark Twain's letters to his wife, friends, and publishers may represent reality. Content analysis provides a quantitative measure of motivation of aggression. Three categories of motivation examined are self-aggression, moral outrage, and teasing. A comparison of Twain's fantasy and reality suggests that: (1) there is a dimension of overt versus non-overt aggression that provides a response hierarchy in which object-directed playful non-overt aggression is subordinate to serious overt aggression; (2) when the self is perceived as the frustrator, but there is constraint on the social expression of aggression, the aggression will be displaced in the form of self-aggressive fantasy; (3) when other persons or social institutions which have personal representatives are perceived as the frustrating agents, and there is serious constraint on social expression, the displacement will take the form, in fantasy, of moral outrage directed toward people in authority; and (4) when the frustrating circumstances are both implacable and relatively impersonal, constraint on expression of aggression will force its displacement into moral outrage and self-aggression in both fantasy and reality. (ABL)

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Prepared for presentation at the Amer. Psychol. Assn. Meetings,  
Los Angeles, Aug. 25, 1985.

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### Fantasy and Reality in Mark Twain's Aggression

By Robert R. Sears

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For a long time, psychoanalysis has been a favorite method for studying personality and motivation. But while its technique of free association is especially effective in discovering the psychodynamics that characterize a particular person, the method as a whole does have some disadvantages. It relies solely on the patient's behavior in a single social situation; hence it has very limited predictive or explanatory value for his behavior away from the analytic couch. Furthermore, the method requires the interaction of a "user-friendly" analyst and an analysand. This precludes the use of psychoanalysis for the study of dead people, and practically speaking, it prevents an investigator from studying a completed life. As is evident from the subjects with whom we are concerned this afternoon, this is a serious disadvantage. To study Mark Twain, for example, we need a more rigorous method of biographical analysis.

Because the subject is not present to interact with a therapist, we must obtain data from multiple sources. These data can include the products of an artist's fantasies as well as his reality-oriented social behavior, and they obviously must include descriptions of the situational factors that are so essential to an understanding of the full personality. Biographical analysis of a dead person has one other spectacular advantage over psychoanalysis -- when you have constructed your hypotheses to account for all the facts you have available, the subject cannot make a fool of you by behaving in a way you did not expect!

I suggest that for developing hypotheses about personality structure, motivation and psychodynamics, it is equally possible to use a non-therapeutic biographical analysis, as I will illustrate with the example of Mark Twain's aggression. My aim is to examine his writings, his social behavior, and the environmental aspects of his life to see whether there are discoverable principles governing the amount of different kinds of aggressive behavior he displayed.

Mark Twain was very aggressive in his writing, both in his fiction and essays, and in his voluminous correspondence. In his early life, at least, he was not very aggressive otherwise, though in late middle-age he broadened his expression somewhat, becoming quite litigious toward people like his publishers whom he fancied had done him wrong.

Although most of his aggression was verbal -- and of course what we have to work with was the written form -- it was of many different kinds. It ranged from the teasing and practical jokes of Tom Sawyer, through the moral outrage of The Connecticut Yankee, to the desperate prepossession with death and self-aggression of The Chronicle of Young Satan. In between were the violence of war, hostile feelings, stealing and destruction, and even such minor types of injury as tattling. All in all, I have been able to discriminate reliably 17 categories of aggression in Mark Twain's novels. Most of them are to be found in his letters, also, but much less frequently.

These many categories did not appear in random order; they were not just salt and pepper sprinkled promiscuously through his work. On the contrary, certain kinds bunched together at certain times in his life, and it is this differentiation of expression, under different life circumstances, that makes it possible to search for the specific conditions conducive to the display of each form. I have illustrated some of these variations with the diagrams you have in hand, but before you start puzzling over them, let me explain the method of analysis of Mark Twain's writings that I have used, and mention a couple of assumptions I have made.

The first of these is that an author's fictional writing may be treated as fantasy, the same kind of fantasy as daydreaming or doll play. This is not to imply that no elements of reality enter into it and serve as determinants of its content. In Mark Twain's case, aside from the obvious influence of his concerns about how to write books that would sell, and the mechanical details of character and plot construction, there were detectable intrusions of contemporary events that, in some disguised form, entered the plots. Several literary historians have traced these bits and pieces of the outside world in his stories in much the same way a dream analyst would seek to isolate the parts of a dream's content that represented an incorporation of the day's events.

The second assumption is that Mark Twain's letters to his wife, friends, publishers represent reality, the reality of social interaction, with all its possibilities of reward and punishment, reinforcement and inhibition. Again, the fantasy-reality dichotomy is not pure, but relatively speaking, letters may be accounted more subject to constraint than fiction. And the letters to different people must be kept separate because the constraints are different.

Both novels and letters are easy to measure, though the process can be tedious. Content analysis with appropriate categories provides a quantitative measure

of the strength of such a motive as aggression at the time a specific piece of writing was done. For fiction, the first step is to break the continuous narrative into episodes. Then each episode can be scored as containing or not containing some given category of motivation, e.g., self-aggression, moral outrage, teasing, and so on. Of the 17 categories of aggression I have used with Mark Twain, I will discuss only these three, for they are sufficient to make my point. To get a measure of the strength of motive at any given time in the author's life, one can simply count the number of episodes written during that period and then, by content analysis of each episode, determine the percent of episodes containing a particular category.

Fortunately for us, Mark Twain wrote in stints, laying aside many of his novels when they were only partially complete and then returning to them later. He wrote nine major novels between 1868 and 1900, but six of them were written in stints, and so we have a total of 20 very accurately dated chunks of fantasy where we can measure the expression of whatever motive we wish. These measures can then be examined in parallel with the events of his "real" life as revealed by his letters or other biographical reports.

The measurement of reality, either in its stimulus event aspects or the subject's overt behavior to them, is much more difficult. With written materials, such as letters, one can make the same kind of content analysis as is made of the fantasy materials, of course, thereby obtaining the frequency of expression of the same categories. But I know of no way to quantify the larger sweeps of pressure, stimulation, and constraint imposed by the environment. Of course, the joy, arousal, inhibition, sorrow, fear and depression that eventuate in the person himself will be expected to reveal themselves in both the fantasy materials and the reality-oriented letters. Often, too, we know of them through the eyes of friends whose

reports are part of the biography.

Now look at Figure 1. You can see how the three categories of aggression varied in frequency -- or, as I assume, in intensity -- over time. This first diagram shows the frequency of occurrence of self-aggression, teasing and moral outrage in Mark Twain's 20 writing stints between 1868 and 1900. Along the abscissa are the stints, identified by the books of which they were parts, and on the ordinate are the percentages of episodes from each stint that contained the particular categories.

The facts to be explained are the relatively high incidence of both self-aggression and teasing in the early years, and the resumption of high self-aggression at the end, with the gradual reduction of teasing. Self-aggression is the solid line and you can trace it across the page; teasing is the broken line. The question is: What conditions produced both forms of aggression in the early 1870's but maximized one and eliminated the other in the 1890's?

The diagram also shows the data for expressions of moral outrage, which is represented by the squiggly line. The terrific peaks in stints 2 and 3 of The Connecticut Yankee and in the last two stints of Satan certainly cry out for an explanation. Incidentally, for those who worry that this kind of content analysis simply reflects differences in the plots and styles of different novels, note the zero or near-zero occurrence in stints 1 and 4 of Yankee. There is a similar inconsistency in Satan.

Now we must turn to the level of reality. Figure 2 shows comparable content analytic data on self-aggression from the three sets of letters, but first, before commenting on them, some facts and interpretations about Mark Twain's life. It was a turbulent one from an emotional standpoint. The three periods with which we are concerned were the worst, but they had very different qualities from the

standpoint of the excitation and inhibition of aggression. The first was not easy but it was filled with success. Mark Twain had grown up as a crude and undisciplined ragamuffin. At 32, he fell in love with, and married in early 1870, the daughter of an upper middleclass Buffalo family. He had to change his ways radically -- inhibit his exhibitionism, control his swearing and occasional vulgarity, dress appropriately, and become a responsible husband after many years of having been just one of the boys -- and not one of the politer, more refined boys, either. On the other hand, The Gilded Age, Tom Sawyer, and his two travel books -- all published just before, or during the first five years of his marriage -- were enormously successful, and on top of that he quickly became very popular on the lecture circuit.

As I read the situation, Mark Twain was severely frustrated by the constraint on his exhibitionism and expression of aggression. The constraint was chiefly internal, that is, self-generated, and produced a displacement of aggression to the self at the fantasy level. In the reality domain, he did inhibit aggression, both in his social behavior and as represented by a content analysis of his letters. In Figure 2, you can see the frequency of self-aggressive references in letters to his wife, Olivia, to his friend William Dean Howells, and to his older woman friend, Mrs. Fairbanks.

As a secondary test of this hypothesis of displacement into fantasy, we can note what happened in the decade following this. It was a period of considerably less constraint. He had become socialized and very wealthy. His letters became somewhat more overtly self-aggressive, especially to Mrs. Fairbanks, and his business affairs became quite contentious, with substantial litigation and arguments with publishers. His political fulminations were highly overt expressions of verbal aggression. Simultaneously, as the hypothesis suggests, the self-aggression in his novels dropped markedly.

Now consider the teasing category. On an overt-non-overt dimension, teasing is at the gentle, attenuated, non-overt end. It contrasts with the vigorous overtness of moral outrage and of direct verbal and physical aggression. All these three were relatively low in the first period, while teasing was at its highest, and then rose significantly in later years when teasing virtually disappeared. I suggest that in the response hierarchy of aggression, teasing is low and the direct forms are high. They replace teasing when frustration increases or when constraint on aggressive expression is reduced. It is also worth noting that the frustrations in this early period of Mark Twain's life were self-imposed and were successfully coped with.

The second period with which we are concerned is that of the late 1880's when moral outrage so sharply characterized Mark Twain's fantasies. It was a period of intense and realistic frustration over which he had no control. As a result of several years of reckless speculation on the Paige type-setting machine, he suddenly faced both bankruptcy of his publishing business and the ultimate failure of his speculations. There was little he could do to cope with his disasters. Unlike the early period, when he was successfully in control of his fate and he himself was the frustrating agent, he was now dominated by economic forces quite beyond him, and the frustrating agents were bankers, and the inventor, Paige, who were seen as external to the self.

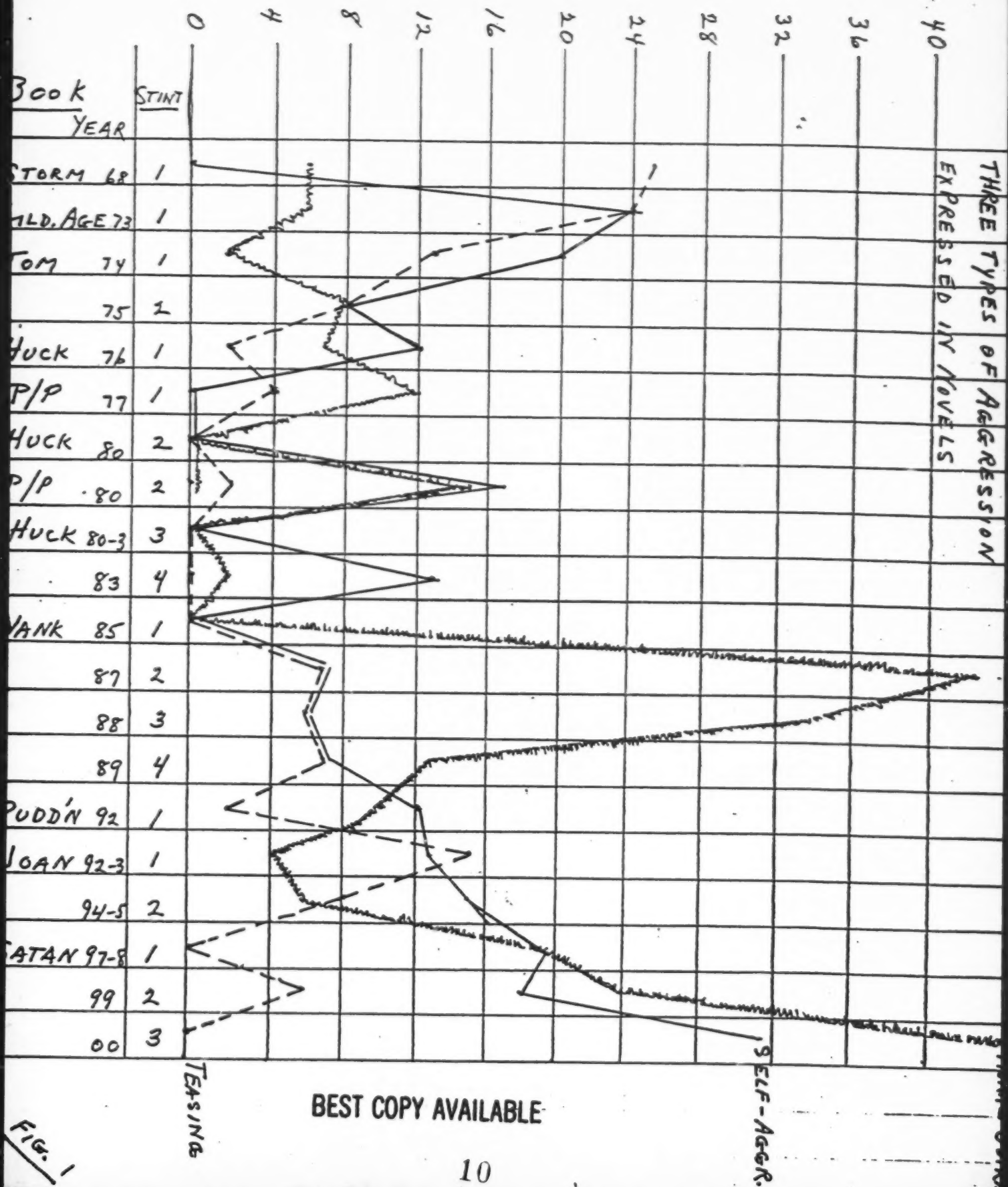
Now we move over to the last period. The events of the late 1890's suggest that this perception of personal agents of misfortune was an important determinant of displacement to moral issues, represented by the evil behavior of others, rather than to the self. *A quite different situation faced him* In the early 90's, one of his daughters was diagnosed as epileptic, and shortly thereafter it became evident that his wife's health was failing seriously. Then in 1896, his oldest daughter died suddenly of meningitis. These were frustrations by loss of loved ones, losses over which, again,

he had no control, but now without such personal agents as bankers and inventors to serve as obvious frustrations. His bankers and Paige could be held to blame for his earlier troubles, but his wife and daughters, though agents of his suffering, could not rationally be blamed for their illnesses. There were no constraints on his expression of anger, except that he dared not direct it toward them. Hence, we find both moral outrage and self-aggression exploding to new peaks in both his fiction and his letters written during this period. And there was no teasing.

In sum, I suggest the following hypotheses: (1) There is a dimension of overt vs. non-overt aggression that provides a response hierarchy in which object-directed playful non-overt aggression is subordinate to serious overt aggression; (2) when the self is perceived as the frustrator, but there is constraint on the social expression of aggression, the aggression will be displaced in the form of self-aggressive fantasy; (3) when other persons, or social institutions which have personal representatives, are perceived as the frustrating agents, and there is serious constraint on social expression, the displacement will take the form, in fantasy, of moral outrage directed toward people in authority; and (4) when the frustrating circumstances are both implacable and relatively impersonal, constraint on expression of aggression will force its displacement into both moral outrage and self-aggression in both fantasy and reality.

Now, as of 1985, I cannot pretend that all these four hypotheses are entirely novel. The first was inherent if not explicit in Frustration and Aggression, published nearly half a century ago. The other three, dealing with the influence of the agents of frustration and the way in which they determine displacement in both fantasy and reality, are less hackneyed -- and might, in retrospect, help us to understand the moral outrage that so strongly characterized student behavior in the 1960's.

# % OF EPISODES



# % OF LETTERS

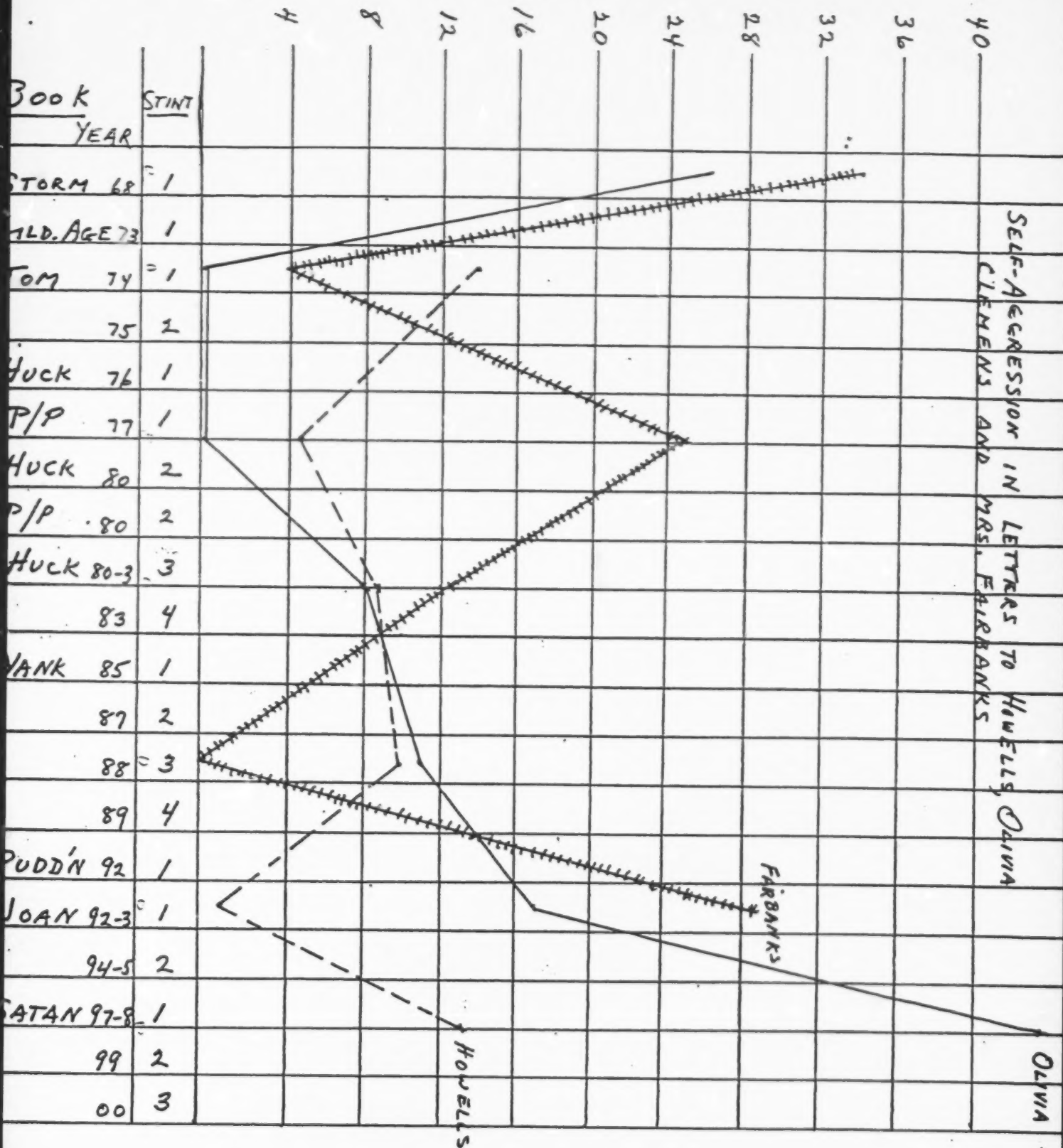


FIG. 2

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